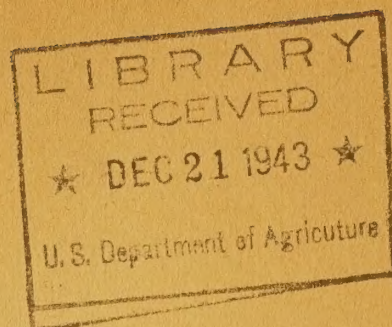


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ECONOMIC RESULTS OF CONSERVATION

BY R. M. EVANS, MEMBER
BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM
WASHINGTON, D. C.

There is an old saying which Americans, above all others, should keep in the forefront of their minds during the post war period--"The shores of the business world are strewn with the wreckage of those who could not or would not change with the changing times."

American agriculture started out rather simply at the time this country was founded. The colonists were mainly interested in producing sufficient agricultural commodities to give them the necessary food and clothing to survive in this new world, and they were not thinking very much about anything else. Agriculture was almost entirely a business centered around the individual farm. Here, by their own efforts, the people produced the bare necessities of life and sold just enough to secure a few additional essentials imported from Europe, but agriculture was not a real industry. Practically everyone was engaged in farming, whereas today probably less than 25 percent of the American people till the soil.

As the Colonies developed and expanded, their simple wants increased, and they did not have the necessary manufacturing facilities to produce them, so they purchased these articles from abroad and paid for them largely with increased agricultural production. The countries of the old world were glad to find this new source of raw materials and a new market for their manufactured articles, and, consequently, trade flourished. The desire of Great Britain to keep the Colonies as sources of raw materials and as markets for the finished products of her industry helped to bring on the Revolution.

After the Revolution, America started to develop in a big way. Agriculture expanded, and although the percentage of the total population engaged in the actual cultivation of the land was constantly decreasing, the total volume of agricultural products increased, due to better seed, better machinery, and other improved practices. However, people paid little or no attention to maintaining the fertility of the soil they tilled. When it was worn out and exhausted by the prevailing exploitative type of agriculture, the people packed their household goods in a wagon and moved toward the West, where they found rewarding virgin land. For reasons that I shall not attempt to explain, people who had been used to taking care of the soil in Europe, failed to do so here. Perhaps they thought the soil in this rich new country would never wear out--I don't know. But in any event they were too careless with it.

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The steady march of our people toward the West increased the demand for towns, railways, and improvements of all kinds. We lacked the capital in this country to make these improvements and borrowed it from Europe wherever we could. We paid for this capital by exporting agricultural commodities in ever-increasing volume. What we really did was to finance the building of America by trading our soil capital (in the form of fertility) for the Old World's money capital, and I think it was really a very costly trade. Occasionally, someone would raise his voice in protest against the exploitation of the fertility of our soil but, in general, his voice was drowned in the hum of industrial development.

After the first World War, economic conditions forced us to look around and see the result of our experiences up to that time. We found that our country had changed from a debtor to a creditor nation. We did not know exactly what this meant, but we did understand that the people in Europe no longer had investments in this country which provided them with the funds to buy our agricultural products. We knew our production had been stepped up tremendously in order to aid the war effort, and surpluses began to appear. We finally realized that some of our better farming areas were no longer producing as abundantly and as efficiently as they had in the past. We found that the American policy of high protective tariffs made it increasingly difficult for Europeans to sell sufficient goods and services here to pay for the farm commodities they needed. We noticed that they were trading in other parts of the world where they could make such an exchange. We were struggling with ourselves to find out whether we wanted to be a part of a world economy or whether we wanted to live within ourselves --and to a certain extent we still are.

We are a democracy, and sometimes democracies discover the reasons for their difficulties in a hard and painful way. Some of those anxious for more swift and positive action have criticized democracies as opposed to the dictator-type or highly centralized type of government. But democracies have, among other highly desirable features, one very strong point that the Nazi-type of government does not have. A democracy has within the framework of its governmental structure the machinery necessary for correcting such errors.

And so, we started, slowly but surely, to correct some of the errors we had been making.

Our agricultural surpluses continued to pile up as our foreign markets steadily decreased. Prices of farm commodities sank lower and lower. Farmers plowed additional land in order to raise more crops so that the increased volume at lower prices would furnish them with sufficient money to pay their fixed costs. Prices went even lower. The farmers plowed more land. Nature screamed at our recklessness, and the duststorms laid the evidence of our abuse of the soil on every housewife's window ledge. The farmers' buying power in the markets almost vanished. The cash registers in the country stores were silent. The "Okies" were on the march, and the dance of the soil exploitative type of agriculture went faster and faster.

The agricultural depression became Nation-wide and everyone was affected. We were grievously injured. We woke up, rubbed our eyes, and said, "This is something we can no longer tolerate--let us try to correct

it." So we looked over our past record and found many amazing facts. I will set out a few and try to demonstrate their relationship to the care of the land. In the first place, soil conservation is not entirely in the hands of the farmer. You in the cities steer his ship more than you may think.

First, we learned that we had settled our last agricultural frontier, for the salty waters of the Pacific halted our westward march. We had plowed wherever a plow would work. We stopped and looked back along our trail, and we saw a shameful record written on the land. Because we had not changed with the changed needs of our agricultural industry, we were practically wrecks on the sands of time.

Another point we discovered was that industry, even in good times, was no longer absorbing the young people from the farms at the same rate it had in the past. The net result of this was that the movement from the farm to the city was reduced to a mere trickle and was even reversed for a time after 1929. People piled up on the farms, and during the 10-year period following 1929 more than 2 million people were added to the farm population while, due to technological improvements, fewer farmers were actually required to supply the agricultural needs of the people. Today, in spite of a smaller supply of labor, we are turning out the greatest production in the history of our agriculture. Please keep this fact in mind for your future planning.

It must be understood that, after the war, agriculture cannot absorb additional workers without paying the terrific cost of a lower standard of living on the farms and an increase in soil depletion. Take a look at some of our run-down farms and you will find that sometimes the number of acres available for cultivation is not sufficient to provide a decent living for the family on the farm. People have tried to increase their income by exploiting the soil and plowing every possible acre. They work hard, but even then they do not have a satisfactory living standard, and if they continue to exploit the land their situation will constantly grow worse. In any soil conservation program for the future, you must make it one of your premises that the size of the farm must be adequate and the use of the land must be sound enough to assure industrious and efficient operators a reasonable standard of living.

It is my opinion that the ability of industry and commerce to absorb the surplus agricultural population produced on the farm is one of the main factors in insuring for us a sound soil conservation program--and, of course, I don't need to tell you that a program of that kind is a program for human conservation at the same time.

History tells us that the turning point in the affairs of nations has often coincided with the decline in the fertility of their soil. According to a study of the Roman Empire, we find that the farmers were drawn into the ranks of their legions. The farms were neglected, and when the soldiers returned from the wars, they found their farms in decay and that they were no longer able to produce a living for the operator. The soldiers congregated more and more in the cities, causing unemployment and unrest. It was to prevent their action as mobs that the ancient Caesars provided bread and circuses. But this was only a temporary expedient. Rome failed to solve this problem and soon gave way to a fresher, more virile type of people. Certainly we can avoid a similar fate.

One of the best signs that the times have definitely changed is that intelligent groups in the cities, such as your group here, are looking into the crystal ball of the future with intelligence, courage, and resourcefulness.

I think everyone is now more conscious of the importance of food than ever before. This is particularly true of the important sources of protein, such as meat, poultry, and dairy products. Now that we are a little short of some of these products, due principally to the war effort and the increased income of laboring people, we are more conscious of our dependence upon these foods than ever before. Food is a weapon of war, and if we had not begun checking our exploitative type of farming in 1933, and if we had not started to build up a storehouse of fertility in the soil and to treat our farm lands properly, using good soil-conserving methods and water-conserving measures, we could not have done the production job we are doing today. These abundant crops are not altogether a "weather" accident.

A little over 2 years ago I was in England talking with some British Cabinet members about the food situation and I found they were thoroughly familiar with the importance of protein foods. I will repeat just one conversation, which I think will illustrate the point I wish to make, and it will also give you a clearer picture of the importance of food as a war weapon.

Just before returning from England in 1941, I called on Mr. Bevin, the Minister of Labor, and I told him that if American agriculture were going to furnish all the food England seemed to need it would be a tremendous task and that I would like to know from him just exactly how important additional food would be in the total war effort. Remember that was before Pearl Harbor. He said that if America would give Great Britain sufficient meat, eggs, and cheese so they could increase the basic ration of the laboring people engaged in the war industries, he would guarantee to increase the output of these war industries 20 percent in a month's time. That was an astounding statement, but it was a true statement, and the increased supplies of food sent from this country enabled them to keep that promise. Then a plane or a tank or a gun is manufactured over there, it is just that much less drain on our manpower, shipping, and natural resources. The foods we are raising in this country will be one of the most potent forces at the peace table. Our limited experience in soil conservation has paid dividends far beyond our fondest expectations, but, unfortunately, not many people are aware of the size or magnitude of these dividends.

Protein foods are the direct result of sound soil conservation farming, because livestock requires a great deal of hay and pasture. In the long run, this type of agriculture means we will have fewer acres of soil-depleting crops, such as cotton, corn, and tobacco, and more acres of soil-conserving crops, such as grass and pasture. We will have a better balanced year-round type of agriculture and make a larger and steadier contribution to the national income, and it will be possible for the American people to correct some of the dietary deficiencies our lower income people have suffered in the past.

I want to refer to one more conversation I had in England, and it is a conclusion with which many people will disagree. I visited the farm of a retired English doctor, who had achieved a great reputation in his practice. As he showed me round his farm, I was struck with the fact that he had unusually fine, productive pastures and that all his beef cattle, dairy cattle, hogs, and poultry were being fed on them. When I told the doctor I liked his way of farming, he said, "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Evans, I am an old man now and I don't have the time or the energy to enter into a long drawn-out controversy, but I was one of those who did some of the original research work on vitamins and almost all of my colleagues laughed at me at first. However, that attitude has completely changed. Now I want to tell you that the products of livestock which have been fed on good grass in the sunshine are superior from a nutritional standpoint to the products of livestock not so raised."

The grass, combined with feed grown on fertile land, produces the best possible products for human consumption from a nutritional standpoint, and, in addition, this type of agriculture returns the maximum to the soil. Many times, soil is just considered dirt, but that is not true as fertile soil is full of humus and living organisms, and unless one maintains the proper balance one will not have a highly productive farm.

If we approach this soil conservation problem from a long-time view-point, one of the first things we will have to do is to convince the American people that conservation of the soil is a national problem. Farmers come and go, but the land they farm remains forever, and unless this land is kept up properly it cannot serve future generations as it should. I am merely raising this point because I think our Government, along with other governments, will have to consider soil fertility as a great national resource that cannot be squandered by wasteful farming.

At the International Food Conference in Hot Springs last May, soil conservation was one of the principal topics of discussion. The representatives at the Conference included scientists and farmers from 44 countries, and I think the very fact that they were so interested in this problem indicates that the whole world is aware of the necessity for action. As a matter of fact, when I was in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, a survey was made of public opinion in some of the eastern towns and cities, and it was found that an overwhelming percentage of the people in these towns and cities were in favor of soil conservation, although I am quite certain few of them had a very clear idea of what it was.

Now, let's take a look at some of the recommendations made at the International Food Conference:

"XX. CONSERVING LAND AND WATER RESOURCES

- "1. Soil erosion has in the past destroyed or severely limited the utility of vast areas of land and will in the future, unless checked, constitute the greatest physical danger to the world's food production;

"2. Failure to conserve and control water supplies and to use them efficiently has, in many areas, precluded important potential increase in food production;

"3. To meet the food needs of the growing world population and to ensure high nutritional standards, all land in agricultural use or suitable for being brought into agricultural use should be adequately protected from erosion and from any other serious damage by various measures, including structural work and the insurance of satisfactory agricultural systems and husbandry practices;

"4. The conserving of land and water resources should be regarded as an obligation of governments as well as individuals."

It is fitting and proper that you people in the towns and cities should exercise leadership in this new crusade because, as time goes on, the residents of towns and cities will have a great stake in agriculture. Our national agricultural programs should be based on sound soil conservation farming, combined with a large ever-normal granary for the protection of consumers, and acreage allotments and marketing quotas for the protection of the farmers. If the effort is successful, we will have a different type of agriculture from that we have at the present time because we will automatically produce more of the fruits, meat, poultry, and dairy products required for a well-balanced diet, and there will be an abundance of these products over a long period of years. One of your problems will be to keep industrial employment at a high level so the people will have the purchasing power to buy the products of soil conservation farming. In a generation, the type of people who live in this country will be changed. They will be healthier people and brighter people, and I am sure that combination will mean they will be better citizens--so from any angle you may care to view a project of this kind, it seems all the people will benefit. The connection between fertile soil and a well-balanced diet is so close that many people refer to the agricultural program of the future as a marriage between nutrition and soil conservation.

There is another aspect of this whole problem I want to discuss rather frankly with you, and that is the relationship of our agricultural colleges to a program of this kind. Now, the agricultural colleges in this country have not, as a general rule, considered grass a good crop. All too frequently, they take the point of view that grass should be grown on land which cannot be used for other crops. As a matter of fact, there is plenty of evidence to indicate that grass on good land will produce just as good returns, if not better, than any of the soil-depleting crops customarily grown on good land. I am not particularly critical of the colleges, because I think they gave us the information we wanted. We wanted to produce abundant crops, and they gave use the knowledge to do that. Now we want to change our agriculture toward the grassland type, and I think we should make it plain to them that the experimentation and research of the future should be along that line.

In many parts of the world, the grassland type of agriculture has been making rapid strides. You can rotate pastures, but who knows a great deal about it? What are the best types of grasses for our particular soils and climates? How can we best utilize grass, and how can we build up and maintain these pastures? These questions and many others require answers, but we cannot be certain of them until we have more experience than we have had to date. Perhaps the colleges can give us the answers relatively soon. In the meantime, I think we should see that all our agricultural programs point toward a proper balance between soil-depleting and soil-conserving crops as soon as the war is over, and if industry is unable to keep the people employed so our national income is high enough to provide people with the purchasing power needed to consume the products of this type of farming, the Government will have to step in and see that the people do not suffer for the lack of a proper diet.

I am afraid I haven't helped you very much in the study of your problem beyond raising a few questions and pointing out a few courses of action. This is a new cause--it is timely and it needs consideration very, very badly. It is a worthy cause into which you can put your energy and enthusiasm because its successful accomplishment will mean that our country will go forward. I am certain that unless you are successful, the forward progress of our country will gradually slow down and then the long decline will start. The road "forks" right now, and the challenge to all of us is the one I outlined at the beginning of my talk--Can we change with the changing times? Can we make democracy work?

I say "Yes," because I believe we still have the same courage, resourcefulness, and foresight our forefathers had when they founded this country. They broke away from old habits and customs and from the ties of their native lands. They did a great many things over here that were considered radical at that time. But because they did blaze a new trail in every sense of the word, they created a civilization without parallel in human history. Of course, they had a great many natural resources to work with, but many other countries have great natural resources, too, and still they have a low standard of living. I think if we have the courage, vision, and resourcefulness to take the magnificent machinery we will have when the war is over, and do a job for the coming generation comparable with that done for us by our forefathers, peace and prosperity will be with us. If we do not, we shall certainly lose the gains that have been made.

